

Message from the Chief

Chief's Memo – July 19, 2006

When Hell Came Knocking, They Said: "Not Today"

I just returned from the Sawtooth Complex fire that claimed one person's life, consumed 61,700 acres, and resulted in 17 minor injuries. "Hell was knocking on the door and they said, 'Not today,'" said one Pioneertown resident referring to the firefighters who saved his home.



I observed many heroic efforts from the combined local, state, and federal personnel fighting the Sawtooth Complex fire in San Bernardino County. Those efforts came from not just the firefighters out on the front line, but from an entire cadre of over 3,000 personnel working to support the effort to save the lives and property of the residents of that community.

From the PIOs who worked professionally and diligently to feed accurate and timely information to an international press corps, to the mechanics who worked tirelessly in temperatures above 115 degrees to keep fire equipment safe and operating, and to the tremendous coordination and cooperation at the Sawtooth helitack base, it was a real team effort to fight this large fire in the high desert.

I had a great opportunity to meet many of the dedicated employees of CDF who make these operations work so smoothly. Many of them go about doing their job with very little appreciation or recognition as to the importance of their role in the successful outcome of the fire suppression activities. Take Terry Acrey for example. An important part of the Incident Command Team, he and his staff keep personnel supplied with everything they need. Yet, when asked by a CNN reporter what his role was at the incident, Terry replied, "Supplies!" and then went about his job meeting the needs of others, not looking for any recognition or limelight.

Greg Pisano (SLU) who was working as the Crew Tech Chief highlighted another example of the dedication of CDF employees. Greg was experiencing some significant abdominal pain as he went about his job at the Sawtooth Command Post. He felt he could overcome the discomfort and continued working diligently on the incident. Unknown to Greg, he had burst his appendix two days earlier. Greg was rushed to a local hospital for emergency surgery. I visited him two hours after his surgery and all Greg wanted to know was how the fire was going, how much containment did we have, and that he was certain that he would be back to work in

about a week. Greg was doing well when I left, although it hurt to laugh. His family was en route to be by his side.

Captain Rod Delgado (BDU) demonstrated the ultimate in dedication. Rod was on the initial attack and coordinated area wide structure protection in the Pioneertown area. Rod was also building a new home in the immediate vicinity of the fast-moving fire. Although he had not yet moved into his new home, he had moved all of his belongings into a storage container on the property. His new home was landscaped with 100 feet of defensible space. The storage container was not. As Captain Delgado was out defending the property of his neighbors and coordinating all incoming resources, the fire moved onto his property. While his home was protected by the defensible space, Captain Delgado lost all of his personal belongings. When I visited with him, his thoughts were for his fellow firefighters still working the fire. Governor Schwarzenegger visited Rod when he heard of his loss to thank him for his dedication and efforts to help others.



There are many people I would like to recognize and thank for their hard work, commitment, and leadership on the Sawtooth Complex fire. They are too numerous to mention them all.

However, I must thank Rob Lewin who worked as one of the Ops Chiefs for his assistance with the Governor's visit. Rob gave the Governor a tour of the fire from the air in the National Guard Blackhawk, as well as a tour on the ground of some of the burned out homes. I must also thank General Wade for the assistance of the National Guard and Henry Renteria, OES Director, for their assistance and teamwork.



I would also like to thank Chief Mike Padilla (AMU) and his staff for working so professionally and diligently to evaluate the potential use of the DC-10 and working to make it available as a tool to the Incident Command Team on the Sawtooth Complex fire. I further want to congratulate Rick Henson, IC, Phil Veneris, Ops Chief, Frank Podesta, Air Branch Director, and all of the team involved in utilizing for the first time, anywhere, the DC-10 to provide an operational and tactical advantage to fighting fire. While this utilization must still undergo much review and

evaluation by CDF staff and others, and while it is clearly not a replacement for CDF air assets, it is this kind of ingenuity and open thinking that makes CDF a leader in the nation.



The two drops by the DC-10 laid a line of retardant 1.3 miles long and approximately 26 feet wide in approximately 37 minutes. Crews on the ground reported good coverage and saturation. There was no damage to tree branches or shrubs. The DC 10 dropped from approximately 300 foot elevation.

I must also thank and congratulate ICT 8 for the outstanding cooperation and unified command with our local and federal partners that were critical to making this operation a success. The communication at all levels was extraordinary! The briefings given to Governor Schwarzenegger by the local, state, and federal partners is an example of government working together at its best.



Finally, I recognize that while I was at the Sawtooth Complex fire for a few days, other fires were impacting our state. I'm sure I could find just as many examples of courage, dedication, and commitment at the Canyon Fire or Geysers Fire. Thank you all for the great job you do at every incident.

Thanks to Chief Gregory, Chief Hoehman, Chief McLean, Deputy Director Mike Jarvis, Matt Streck, and Jesse Estrada for keeping me, Secretary Chrisman, the Governor's Office, and the public so well informed. Clearly fire season is here. Everyone be safe!

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Grijalva'.

Ruben Grijalva, Chief
Director / State Fire Marshal

Communications

The CDF Website has a new Incident Website section that was rolled out in June. Fire information, phone numbers, maps, photos and additional fire and CDF-related information can be found on this section of the website. State, national, and international media use the site, and many are linking to it on their own websites. http://cdfdata.fire.ca.gov/incidents/incidents_current

Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP)

FRAP has begun developing new maps to describe Fire Hazard Severity Zones for both state responsibility areas and local responsibility areas. These maps are critical to the application of state statutes such as vegetation clearance and building code standards designed as mitigations against Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) fire losses. A new modeling system, a science peer review, and CDF field level validation will all be used to ensure the development of a quality product with the least diversion of scarce CDF resources. More information on this project can be found at <http://frap.cdf.ca.gov/projects/hazard/fhz.html>

Legislation

A series of three conference calls have been held with members and staff of the legislature, congress and US Senate to update them on fires and CDF issues. Legislature is out of session at this time.

Occupational Safety and Health Programs (OSHPros)

The last six weeks have been extremely busy for the Health and Fitness Unit's Respiratory Protection Program (RPP). The recently negotiated change in the duty week for Firefighter has resulted in close to 700 additional hires, all of which needed to be medically cleared by CDF's Medical Consultant prior to reporting to work. Dedicated RPP staff in Headquarters worked countless hours of overtime to ensure these employees were medically cleared to meet each unit's hiring deadline. Special thanks to Jana Risley, Gina Dokes, Julie Renteria, and Dolores Gilbert for their extraordinary efforts in successfully processing this additional workload in such a short time period. The Regional RPP staff is also to be commended for their hard work in this effort.

Office of State Fire Marshal

Professional fireworks shows were very successful this Fourth of July. All public displays on state property inspected by the Office of the State Fire Marshal went well. No significant incidents or injuries were reported. The OSFM received a report recently about a fire at the Parlin Fork Conservation Camp on the Jackson Demonstration State Forest. It was a small office fire with no injuries or significant damage reported. The fire remains under investigation.

Urban Forestry

The newest report on the "State of Urban and Community Forestry in

California: Status in 2003 and Trends since 1988" is now available for downloading from the UFEI Website. Click on the following to download it now
<http://www.ufe.org/files/ufeipubs/SUF03.pdf>